



Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Program Policies White Paper

Background

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Public Law 90-542, was passed in 1968 to establish the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Congress created this system of free-flowing rivers to complement the established national policy of dam building. Initially, only free-flowing rivers across Federally owned lands were designated for protection as wild and scenic rivers and management under the Act.

The Act also required the creation of a [Nationwide Rivers Inventory](#) (NRI). By 1985 the NRI catalogued more than 4,500 free-flowing river segments as eligible or potentially eligible for inclusion in the [National Wild and Scenic Rivers System](#). Since most of these free-flowing river segments flowed through Federal lands, a new system was needed to designate non-federal or “private lands rivers” for long-term protection and management under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

In 1992, the Great Egg Harbor River in New Jersey became the first Partnership Wild and Scenic River (PWSR). Since it does not flow through federal lands, Congress designated this river to be managed “by the Secretary of the Interior through Cooperative Agreements with Local Jurisdictions.” PWSR designation provided Congressional Authorization for federal funding to be continually appropriated and passed through to local river managers through Cooperative Agreements. The National Park Service (NPS) became the administering agency to work in partnership with local river managers for the long-term management and protection of the Great Egg Harbor River and future PWSRs. Congress also created a line in the Federal budget for this purpose, and the National Park Service designated the Great Egg Harbor National Scenic and Recreational River as a Unit within the National Park System.

Since 1992, Congress has continued to designate additional rivers into what has become known as the [Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Program](#). As of Fiscal Year 2024, 18 rivers in ten states have been designated as PWSRs, with five designations within the last five years. The total appropriation for PWSRs was \$5.3 million and includes funding paid to the NPS to manage and administer the program, as well as funding that is passed through to local managers through Cooperative Agreements. Table 1 lists the PWSRs as of Fiscal Year 2024, which encompass 1088.9 river miles.

Purpose and Need for Partnership Wild and Scenic River Operating Policies

The PWSR Program is a partnership between Congress, the Secretary of the Interior through the NPS, and local governments, councils, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who work together to provide long-term protection and management of America’s Wild and Scenic Rivers flowing through non-federal lands. This collaborative, locally driven planning and management approach to river conservation is an effective and efficient alternative to direct federal management and administration. Congressionally

designated river protection anchored by federal funds leverages substantial additional state, local, and private funding for infrastructure and services. Federal funds also unlock thousands of volunteer hours annually to help implement the river conservation plans.

Table 1. Partnership Wild and Scenic River Designations

| Wild and Scenic River | State | Year Designated | Miles Designated | Public Law |
|----------------------------------|--------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Delaware River (lower) | NJ/PA | 2000 | 67.3 | 106-418 |
| Eightmile River | CT | 2007 | 26.0 | 110-229 |
| Farmington River (lower) | NJ/PA | 2000 | 67.3 | 106-418 |
| Farmington River, West Branch | CT | 1994/2019 | 15.1 | 103-313/116-9 |
| Great Egg Harbor River | NJ | 1992 | 129.0 | 102-536 |
| Housatonic River | CT | 2022 | 40.0 | 117-328 |
| Lamprey River | NH | 1996/2000 | 23.5 | 104-333/106-192 |
| Lower Delaware River | NJ/PA | 2000 | 67.3 | 106-418 |
| Maurice River | NJ | 1993 | 35.4 | 103-162 |
| Missisquoi & Trout Rivers | VT | 2014 | 46.1 | 113-291 |
| Musconetcong River | NJ | 2006/2022 | 28.5 | 109-452/Secretarial |
| Nashua River | MA/NH | 2014/2019 | 52.8 | 113-291/116-9 |
| Sudbury, Assabet, Concord Rivers | MA | 1999 | 29.0 | 106-20 |
| Taunton River | MA | 2009 | 40.0 | 106-318 |
| Wekiva River | FL | 2001 | 78.0 | 106-299 |
| Westfield River | MA | 1993/2004 | 78.0 | Secretarial |
| White Clay Creek | DE/PA | 2000/2014 | 199.0 | 106-357/113-219 |
| Wood-Pawcatuck River | RI/CT | 2019 | 110.0 | 116-9 |
| York River | ME | 2022 | 30.8 | 117-328 |
| 18 PWSRS | | | 1088.9 | |

The PWSR Program continues to grow. Table 2 lists candidate PWSRs encompassing 938 miles on 12 rivers as of March 2025.

Table 2. Potential Partnership Wild and Scenic River Designations

| Wild and Scenic River | State | Designation Status | Estimated Miles |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--|------------------------|
| Kissimmee River | FL | Under Study, H.R. 4404, 7/20/22 | 72.0 |
| Little Manatee River | FL | Under Study, H.R. 4358, 9/21/22 | 50.0 |
| Nullgegan River & Paul Stream | VT | Introduced, S. 432, 2/15/23 | 40.0 |
| Deerfield River | MA | Introduced, S. 608, 3/1/23 | 76.0 |
| Myakka River | FL | Introduced, H.R. 642, 1/23/25 | 34.0 |
| Hatchie River | TN | Introduced, H.R. 949, 2/4/25 | 163.0 |
| Brandywine Creek | DE | Reconnaissance completed, not introduced | 56.0 |
| Upper Raritan River | NJ | Reconnaissance started, not yet introduced | 110.0 |
| Mullica River | NJ | Reconnaissance started, not yet introduced | 192.0 |
| South River | GA | Not yet introduced | 63.0 |
| Little River | AL | Not yet introduced | 29.0 |
| Congaree River | SC | Not yet introduced | 53.0 |
| 12 Candidate PWSRs | | | 938.0 |

Due to its success, oversight and financial management for the PWSR Program have evolved over time as Congress added additional rivers. For Fiscal Year 2007, the NPS broke out the eight designated PWSRs at that time into separate lines in the NPS budget and added an additional line for NPS National Coordination. On October 1, 2014, then Northeast Regional Director Mike Caldwell published the first formal policy paper for PWSRs, [Goals, Operating Principles, and Actions for Sustaining Funding of Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers](#). On May 1, 2015, the NPS published [Director's Order #46: Wild and Scenic Rivers](#). Under Section 4.3 of Director's Order 46, the PWSRs Program was defined as a separate subset of the Wild and Scenic Rivers that NPS managed, and the management responsibilities for these rivers were also defined. On April 12, 2021, [Reference Manual 46: Wild and Scenic Rivers](#) was published to support Director's Order 46, which prescribed responsibilities and management for PWSRs.

Currently, each of the 18 PWSR Cooperative Agreements is handled separately and by different and frequently changing Financial Agreements Office staff. There are no standard operating policies or procedures that apply to PWSRs Cooperative Agreement and no training references. The lack of policies and training have resulted in arbitrary and inconsistent execution and performance periods and numerous and continuing misunderstandings about goals, objectives, duration, funding, and reporting periods. To provide increased consistency, reliability, and government efficiency, policies and training resources, stored in a common accessible digital location, are needed. Policies specific to PWSRs should:

1. Adopt a consistent, efficient, and uniform term for the PWSRs Cooperative Agreements.
2. Establish consistent and uniform periods of performance for the implementation of PWSRs work plans.
3. Streamline annual work plan requirements.
4. Not decrease the budgets of previously designated PWSRs to support newly designated PWSRs that are added in the future.
5. Minimize regional administrative costs.
6. Address any new across-the-board base budget increases and decreases.
7. Align goals for the Wild and Scenic River Program Funds.

All PWSRs Cooperative Agreement recipients are interested in helping the NPS develop operations policies that will increase consistency, reliability, and efficiency, reduce administrative costs, and optimize non-federal funds leveraging.